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SUBJECT: Prime Minister Tells A/S Turner that Red-Dead is
Key to Jordan's Water Future

Ref: A) Amman 3364 B) Amman 3794

1. Summary: Prime Minister Badran told visiting OES Assistant Secretary John Turner on May 31 that Jordan needs the proposed "Red-Dead" water project to cope with its status as one of the world's most water-short countries. Jordan continues its drive to utilize every possible water source but the Jordan River and Dead Sea are feeling the pinch. USAID is playing an important role in building and rehabilitating crucial water infrastructure. End summary.

Overview: Prime Minister, Environment Min., Jordan Valley

2. OES A/S Turner visited Jordan May 30-June 1 for a field-oriented view of Jordan's water resources, especially in sensitive border regions next to Syria and Israel. He met with Prime Minister Adnan Badran on May 31 and had an extensive tour on June 1 of the Zarka area north of Amman with Minister of Environment Khaled Irani. Zarka is the site of one of USAID's real triumphs, the As-Samra wastewater treatment plant. Turner also met Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority Environment Commissioner Belal Bashir and visited two rural environmental projects created by the NGO Friends of the Earth Middle East.

Prime Minister Leads Charge for Red-Dead

3. Prime Minister Adnan Badran, in office for less than two months at the time of his May 31 meeting with A/S Turner, said that environment is "so important," is "at the top of our agenda," and that his cabinet is making "a robust environmental effort." His remarks have added credibility because Badran is a rarity, a lab scientist (in marine biology) who has reached the top ranks of government service, including a stint as the Deputy Director of UNESCO.

4. While noting that Jordan's management of water resources has improved over the years, PM Badran stressed the fact that Jordan remains one of the most water-short countries in the world. He noted that Jordan is getting significant help from USAID to expand wastewater reuse and is trying to improve water quality throughout the Kingdom.

5. PM Badran's core message, however, was requesting USG support for the "Red-Dead" water project (Ref A) to take seawater from the Red Sea at Aqaba, desalinate up to 900 million cubic meters per year and release the briny by-product into the Dead Sea to stop its 70 centimeter per year drop. At another point in the meeting, when Turner asked how to increase water resources on the West Bank and in Gaza, the PM's response was simply "Red-Dead."

AID As-Samra Wastewater Plant Helps Envir, Health, Econ

6. On June 1, A/S Turner and Minister of Environment Khaled Irani visited USAID's flagship project in Jordan, a \$169 million upgrade to the As-Samra wastewater treatment plant north of Amman where the bulk of Amman's domestic wastewater is processed. USAID contributed \$78 million to a cutting-edge 18-party financial deal for the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) project. The upgraded As-Samra plant will dramatically improve the quality of effluent from the facility, thus making the water available for reuse in agriculture. This will improve environmental and health conditions along the Zarka River, will reduce pressure on the Kingdom's fresh water supplies, and will benefit agriculture by making more water available for irrigation.

7. A/S Turner and Minister Irani visited two sites downstream of As-Samra to see the current dismal state of the effluent as it flows into the Zarka River. The Zarka River flows with foamy, dark green water that was being illegally pumped for irrigation before the eyes of Turner and Irani.

8. A/S Turner and Minister Irani gave interviews to print and television journalists at another stop next to a highly polluted stream strewn with tires. A/S Turner emphasized the contributions of the U.S. Government and particularly of USAID in improving the quality of life of ordinary Jordanians. Irani, during his interviews, noted the

importance of the USAID assistance on water resource management and said that rehabilitating the Zarka River was one of his top priorities. Two lengthy articles based on these interviews appeared in the Arabic press and one in the English-language "Jordan Times."

Ministry Needs Strategy In Order to Become Proactive

9. Minister of Environment Irani met A/S Turner at the Ministry of Environment (MOE) prior to the Zarka tour in order to review the MOE's current priorities. Irani said that institutional reform is his most pressing need. He wants the Ministry to have a strategy, clear priorities, and to become "proactive instead of reactive." He provided an executive summary of an EU institutional reform project for the Ministry that will begin soon. Irani was pleased to hear that progress is being made towards sending an EPA environmental economist to Jordan under the Free Trade Agreement and the Joint Environment Forum (Ref B). Irani was effusive in his appreciation of USG and particularly USAID assistance to Jordan's environment sector.

Minister "Loves" NGOs

10. Minister Irani, formerly the head of the NGO the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, said he "loves" NGOs. He clearly intends to make NGO and civil society involvement a cornerstone of environmental policy in Jordan. He added that the major environmental NGOs are well organized amongst themselves in Jordan. Irani said that there are three NGO seats on a nine-person advisory panel to the MOE, and that he pushed the environmental NGO umbrella group to select their own representatives rather than have the Ministry select whom it wants.

11. Irani also spoke highly of the GLOBE program, saying it was "fantastic." At the same time, he said the MOE is weak on awareness programs and that he wants to upgrade the ministry's performance on this issue, including injecting environmental issues into Jordan's school curriculum and "getting outside the box" on environmental education.

Heavy Demands on Jordan Valley Water

12. On May 31, A/S Turner saw much of the complex water infrastructure in the Jordan Valley, beginning with the Al-Wehdah (Unity) Dam along the Yarmouk River that defines the Jordan-Syria border. The dam is scheduled to be completed in March 2006 and will ultimately hold 110 million cubic meters (MCM) of water in a five-kilometer reservoir, according to the dam's Project Manager Mr. Fouad Ejeilat of the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA). The main purpose of the dam is capturing water from winter rains to ensure a steady supply for Jordan's Peace Treaty water commitments to Israel, for irrigation in the Jordan Valley and for drinking water to Amman, especially during the dry summer. Ejeilat told Turner that the JVA expects to use 80 MCM annually from the Al-Wehdah Dam, of which 50 MCM would go to Amman for domestic use and 30 MCM for irrigation in the Jordan Valley.

13. Ejeilat also commented that there are many small dams upstream of the Yarmouk in Syria that reduce the inflow to the Al-Wehdah Dam. Pumps that draw water off the Yarmouk for Syrian farms downstream of the dam reduce the amount of the outflow from the dam that ultimately arrives at the King Abdullah canal in the Jordan Valley.

14. Downstream of the Al-Wehdah Dam in the shadow of the Golan Heights is the Adesieh Weir, where the Yarmouk's flow is split for three uses: to Israel to fulfill water commitments under the 1994 Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, to the King Abdullah Canal for irrigation and drinking water, and to the Yarmouk itself for in-stream flow. The Yarmouk joins the Jordan River a few miles further on. Another crucial but virtually unseen piece of infrastructure is an input pipe to the King Abdullah Canal from Israel that delivers Israel's reciprocal water commitments to Jordan under the 1994 Peace Treaty. That inflow was flowing vigorously into the canal during A/S Turner's stop at the junction.

15. A/S Turner's final stop in the Jordan Valley was at the Deir Alla Control Center. Engineers demonstrated their ability to monitor and control water levels, flow rates and salinity levels through the Valley's numerous dams, pumping stations, gates and canals. JVA Advisor Suhail Wahsheh said that the JVA's canal and delivery system have around 5% water loss, a very low figure. With over 60% of the JVA's water going for irrigation in the valley, efficient irrigation is important, he said. He added that in his view, perhaps 60% of the valley's farmers practice efficient irrigation but that much outreach and education still needs to be done even with that 60% and especially with the laggard 40%.

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Leading the Way in Environment

116. At a May 31 dinner with A/S Turner, Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) Environment Commissioner Dr. Belal Bashir said that tourism and environment, especially its prized coral reefs, are critical parts of Aqaba's development plan. Bashir proudly pointed out that demand for treated wastewater in Aqaba (from an USAID wastewater treatment plant) already exceeds the supply. He was interested in learning more from A/S Turner about environmental enforcement at the state level in the United States since Aqaba operates at the sub-national level. Bashir matter of factly noted Aqaba's lengthy cooperation with Israel on environmental issues, including, he noted laughingly, his conniving with Israeli counterparts to force actions in both countries.

NGO Brings Park, Drinking Water System to Rural Village

117. A/S Turner's last stop in Jordan before driving across the Sheikh Hussein Bridge into Israel on June 1 was the Sheikh Hussein community, a small, poor village in the rural northern Jordan Valley. Representatives of the NGO Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) showed Turner two of their projects there, a rainwater harvesting system at the local school that provides drinking water to school kids, and a 10-hectare park. With the water distribution system operating only one or two days per week, children were forced to carry their drinking water from home and to urinate in the bushes around the school. FOEME's water harvesting system, paid for in part by the U.S.-supported "Good Water Neighbors" program, saves rainwater that runs off from the roof into big barrels that are used later to supply drinking water and for toilets. FOEME cleverly wants to use a natural depression at its nearby park to create a swimming pool, in part because several children drown annually swimming in the steep-sided King Abdullah canal.

118. Comment: Jordan isn't there yet on water resource management, although there are bright spots. Agriculture consumes over 60% of Jordan's water but contributes a meager 3% of Jordan's GDP. The stress of meeting this demand is fraying Jordan's ecosystems.

119. A/S Turner has cleared this cable.

HENZEL